

VZCZCXRO9600  
OO RUEHDE  
DE RUEHMK #0873/01 1381408  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 181408Z MAY 06  
FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA  
TO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
INFO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4745  
RHMFISS/USCENTCOM CCJ5 - PERSONAL FOR MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY  
RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RHBVAKS/COMUSNAVCENT PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 MANAMA 000873

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

SECDEF PASS TO //USDP/ISA//

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/17/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [ASEC](#) [BA](#) [REGION](#) [BILAT](#)  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR U.S.-BAHRAIN MILITARY CONSULTATIVE  
COMMITTEE, 23-24 MAY

MANAMA 00000873 001.2 OF 004

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador William T. Monroe for Reasons 1  
.4(b) and (d)

11. (SBU) Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Long, we warmly welcome you and the U.S. Delegation to the 13th Annual U.S.-Bahrain Military Consultative Committee (MCC) 23-24 May.

We have requested meetings with the Minister of Defense, Lieutenant General Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Khalifa, the Bahrain Defense Force Chief of Staff Major General Duaij Salman Al Khalifa, the Director of the Bahrain National Security Agency Khalifa bin Ali Al Khalifa, and Vice Admiral Patrick Walsh, Commander of the Fifth Fleet stationed here in Bahrain.

12. (S) U.S. relations with Bahrain are strong and positive, anchored by the long and welcomed presence of NAVCENT/Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain. Bahrain has consistently supported U.S. policy in the region, most notably on Iraq and Iran, and greatly values the U.S. as a friend and ally. Economic/commercial relations are soon expected to receive an important boost with the implementation of the U.S.-Bahrain Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the first FTA we have signed with a Gulf country. This is not to say that there have not been some issues of contention between our two countries. NAVCENT sent home more than 900 dependents in 2004 in the wake of concerns about the GOB commitment to deal with a small cell of Sunni terror suspects; counterterrorism cooperation has since improved significantly, although we remain concerned about Sunni extremist activity on the island, however small in scale. While we have regularly praised Bahrain for the important steps it has taken in introducing democratic reform, we were not pleased when Bahrain recently forced the departure of NDI's representative in Bahrain, effectively closing the NDI office here. On the Bahrain aside, press coverage of the remaining three Bahraini detainees at Guantanamo has been heavy and critical, putting some pressure on the Government to resolve, or be seen as trying to resolve, this issue with its good American friend.

13. (C) There are three issues of paramount importance to the Bahraini leadership and people at the current time: Iraq, Iran, and the upcoming parliamentary elections. The fact that Bahrain, with a Shia majority population, sits on the fault line of Sunni-Shia sectarian relations in the region, plays into each of these issues. On Iraq, Bahrain's Shia welcomed the fall of Saddam and were no doubt encouraged by Shia successes in Iraq there as they made the decision to participate in Bahrain's upcoming elections. While the Government has fully supported our policy on Iraq, developments there have raised concerns among some Sunni

about the potential threat of Shia empowerment in Bahrain and the region. On Iran, Bahrain's leadership is deeply concerned about Iranian interference in Iraq, Iran's nuclear program, and President Ahmadi-nejad's bellicose rhetoric. The government supports our policy on Iran, but worries about Iran's ability to interfere with Bahrain's Shia community. It understands that Bahrain could be a prime target if Iran sought to retaliate for increased pressure on its nuclear program. All this comes in the context of upcoming parliamentary elections. The main Shia opposition political society, which boycotted the 2002 elections, recently announced that it will participate in this year's election. Although Shia opposition participation has long been a stated goal of the King, recent moves, such as the hard-line the government has taken on USG-funded NDI programming, seem to reflect uneasiness among at least some in the leadership as we head into the election season.

-----  
DEALING WITH IRAN  
-----

¶4. (C) . Bahrain is watching developments in Iran closely. The Crown Prince has requested several times U.S. or NATO consideration of a formal security umbrella for Bahrain in the event of a nuclear threat. During his May 8 meeting with CENTCOM Commander General Abizaid, the CP inquired about obtaining Patriot missiles. State Department Counselor Zelikow, Under Secretary Joseph, and an interagency delegation led by Assistant Secretary Hillen visited Bahrain recently and raised the concept of a U.S.-GCC strategic dialogue addressing regional threats, especially Iran. The Foreign Ministry has told us Bahrain intends to endorse the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and will formally confirm this shortly. Bahrain has been invited to participate in the PSI Anatolian Sea Exercise later this month..

MANAMA 00000873 002.2 OF 004

¶5. (C) Bahrain's relationship with Iran is complex. The Bahraini leadership is united in its suspicion of Iranian intentions regarding Bahrain and often sees an Iranian hand in incidents involving Bahrain's Shia community, which comprises some 70 percent of the country's citizens. They are convinced Iran seeks to develop nuclear weapons and assert its influence around the region. At the same time, Bahrain faces the reality that it must live with its large neighbor across the Gulf. The Iranians, angered when Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid accused elements from Iran of "playing with fire" in the Gulf, have been actively pursuing engagement with Bahrain, including most recently a May 8 visit by FM Motakki, a recent Ahmadi-Nejad phone call to the King, and a visit by NSC Secretary General Larijani. Trade relations are reportedly growing. It is not clear that the Bahraini leadership has come to grips with how it will handle efforts to ratchet up the pressure on Iran if that includes, for example, calls for cutbacks in trade and engagement. The Foreign Minister recently told us Bahrain will have no problem applying sanctions adopted by the UN Security Council.

-----  
NEXT STEPS ON IRAQ  
-----

¶6. (C) The GOB has issued public statements in support of each step in Iraq's political development. We have urged the government to look for ways to show public and tangible support for the new Iraqi government once it is announced. You can reinforce this message during your visit.

¶7. (C) The Bahraini leadership is concerned about the spillover of sectarian tensions in Iraq to Bahrain. Tens of thousands of Bahrainis, Sunni and Shia, marched peacefully to protest the Samarra mosque bombing in February, and there has been no spike in inter-communal friction. However, some in

the Sunni community worry about Shia political empowerment in the run-up to parliamentary and municipal council elections later this year.

-----  
DOMESTIC POLITICS HEATS UP  
-----

¶18. (U) The government has yet to set a date for the elections (anticipated this fall), and some rumored amendments to the election law may be designed to inhibit Shia participation in the elections. Leading Shia opposition society Al Wifaq held a press conference May 3 to announce formally that it will field candidates in the parliamentary elections, and opposition society Al Wa'ad has also announced its intention to participate. Both societies boycotted the 2002 parliamentary elections.

¶19. (C) During the month of March, there were repeated clashes between small groups of Shia men and security forces. The incidents typically began with young masked men burning tires or trash dumpsters on the edge of a village, and throwing Molotov cocktails at police vehicles when security forces responded. Police routinely employed tear gas to disperse protesters. Villagers caught in the middle demanded that the youth stop provoking the police, as small children, the sick and elderly were harmed by the gas. Following public statements by Shia leaders calling on the instigators to stop, the incidents subsided. The clashes were likely organized by the breakaway hard-line Shia Haq Movement, which is in competition with Al Wifaq for the support of the Shia community. In this case, it appears that Haq overreached and provoked a backlash that could damage its longer term support.

¶10. (C) In a recent development, an explosive device that newspapers referred to as a "stun grenade" or "sound bomb" exploded the evening of April 26 in the upscale commercial district of Adliya. There was no damage or injuries, but word of the incident hit the international news, including CNN. A police patrol vehicle carrying two officers was hit by Molotov cocktails on April 29, and seven other vehicles were burned the same night. The Embassy is in close contact with the Ministry of Interior about these incidents. The confrontations appear to be a further extension of Shia extremists' activities against the government. There is no indication that American or Western interests are being targeted.

-----  
U.S. NAVY

MANAMA 00000873 003.2 OF 004

-----  
¶11. (U) The U.S. Navy has worked closely with Bahrain for more than fifty years. Bahrain is the only country in the region that hosts a permanent component command headquarters, specifically, headquarters facilities for the Commander of Naval Forces, U.S. Central Command (COMUSNAVCENT). COMUSNAVCENT directs naval operations in the Arabian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Gulf of Aden in support of Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, CJTF Horn of Africa, as well as Maritime Interception Operations to enable freedom of navigation and to prevent oil smuggling, piracy and various other operations in support of the Global War on Terrorism. Bahrain's relatively stable and secure political environment allows deployed U.S. Navy ships to stop, replenish supplies, and provide crews much needed onshore rest and recreation opportunities. In 2004, 421 U.S. Navy ships called at Manama while 377 ships called in 2005. Additionally, U.S. military and military-contracted air traffic at Bahrain's International Airport and other local facilities encompassed 3521 landings in 2004 and 3415 landings in 2005.

-----  
MILITARY ASSISTANCE

-----  
¶12. (U) The Bahrain Defense Force (BDF) maintains an infrastructure capable of handling U.S. deployments in support of our regional policies and forms the first line of defense for the headquarters of the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet. To continue to be an effective coalition partner, the BDF, which deployed its navy in support of Operations Enduring and Iraqi Freedom, must be fully compatible with the U.S. military. Maintaining this capability has become increasingly expensive, stressing a BDF budget that is already insufficient to purchase the advanced U.S. hardware needed to achieve interoperability. U.S. provided Foreign Military Financing (FMF) has been declining over the past few years, making it increasingly difficult for the BDF to meet its needs. With the advent of a democratically elected lower house of parliament that requires the BDF to operate within a budget, funding for purchases under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program have also become scarcer. FMF and International Military Education and Training (IMET) will continue to be important for both regional stability and force protection goals. FMF and IMET funding for 2006 are \$15.593 million and \$644,000 respectively. Estimates for 2007 are \$15.750 million for FMF and \$640,000 for IMET. You can expect to hear from multiple fronts that if the BDF is to remain fully compatible with the U.S. military and other coalition partners, that more FMF is required. During its May 14 meeting, the Hillen delegation floated the possibility of the U.S. increasing the amount of military assistance it provides to Bahrain.

-----  
GUANTANAMO  
-----

¶13. (C) There were initially six Bahraini detainees at Guantanamo. Three were returned last fall. Bahraini press coverage of the remaining three has been steady and intense, focusing on allegations of mistreatment and hunger strikes. Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid has come under parliamentary pressure to be a more aggressive advocate for their return, and he has told the press and parliament that he raises the issue with senior USG officials at every opportunity.

-----  
AIR DEFENSE  
-----

¶14. (C) In his recent visit to Bahrain, General Abizaid proposed building up the defenses of our allies in the Gulf, looking specifically at a shared early warning system and improving air defense capabilities. The Crown Prince expressed interest in leasing Patriot PAC-3 batteries, and noted the coming TPS-59 air defense radar system would improve Bahrain's integration with allies. The topic of Patriots for Bahrain has been broached on several occasions and will most certainly come up during the MCC or during one of your meetings. We have asked that representatives of the U.S. delegation be prepared to provide the Bahrainis facts, figures, and possibilities for obtaining Patriots. The Crown Prince and the Minister of Defense have requested making an exception for Bahrain's Stinger missiles.

MANAMA 00000873 004.2 OF 004

-----  
PROPOSAL FOR BAHRAIN TO HOST REGIONAL CT CENTER  
-----

¶15. (C) Bahrain was pleased that GCC leaders at their recent summit in Riyadh designated Bahrain as the home of a proposed regional counter-terrorism center. Bahrain will present a proposal for the center at a meeting of GCC Ministers of Interior later this month, with the goal of presenting solid recommendations at the GCC Summit in December. Bahrain would look to the United States for

support on the technical side to improve the sophistication of the local intelligence system, and will undoubtedly seek financial support from its GCC partners. We have invited a representative from the Ministry of the Interior to attend the MCC, and expressed an interest in receiving a presentation from the MOI on their plans for developing and implementing this Regional CT Center.

MONROE